

## Education of young children in the Soviet Union: Current practice in historical perspective

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This article describes how young children are educated in the Soviet Union. The initial section details the structure of education in the USSR, focusing on the changes that have taken place since the school reform of 1984. However, to understand contemporary developments, it is essential to view them in historical perspective, for this reform is only one in a series of changes that have occurred in the Soviet Union's 70-year history. It is also necessary to understand the theoretical and ideological forces that have helped define the nature of the Soviet educational system. Of particular significance is one of the most distinctive guiding principles of Soviet education-its explicit concern with moral education. In keeping with the dominant ideology, this takes the form of inculcation of a set of values and beliefs about collectivism and the importance of "socially useful labor." The second half of the article focuses on the first years of schooling, examining the ways in which the system attempts to inculcate these values and beliefs, as well as some possible drawbacks of an emphasis on a collectively oriented mentality.

**Keywords:** USSR | Soviet Union | collectivism | moral education | elementary education

### **Article:**

\*\*\*Note: Full text of article below

# Education of Young Children in the Soviet Union: Current Practice in Historical Perspective

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## Abstract

This article describes how young children are educated in the Soviet Union. The initial section details the structure of education in the USSR, focusing on the changes that have taken place since the school reform of 1984. However, to understand contemporary developments, it is essential to view them in historical perspective, for this reform is only one in a series of changes that have occurred in the Soviet Union's 70-year history. It is also necessary to understand the theoretical and ideological forces that have helped define the nature of the Soviet educational system. Of particular significance is one of the most distinctive guiding principles of Soviet education—its explicit concern with moral education. In keeping with the dominant ideology, this takes the form of inculcation of a set of values and beliefs about collectivism and the importance of "socially useful labor." The second half of the article focuses on the first years of schooling, examining the ways in which the system attempts to inculcate these values and beliefs, as well as some possible drawbacks of an emphasis on a collectively oriented mentality.

My main intention in this article is to describe the nature of the school system in the Soviet Union. Schooling in the USSR cannot be properly understood, however, without some knowledge of its ideological, theoretical, and historical foundations. I shall therefore discuss some of the more significant aspects of the development of the system as a prelude for considering what is perhaps the most distinctive guiding principle of Soviet education—its explicit concern with moral education. In keeping with the dominant ideology, this takes the form of inculcation of a set of values and beliefs about collectivism and the importance of labor. As will be seen, instilling these values

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begins very early in the lives of Soviet children.

## The Current Structure of Schooling in the Soviet Union

### Preschool

Parents can place their children into one of several types of preschool institutions from as early as 2-3 months, in nurseries (*yaslie*) in which they can remain until they are 3 years of age. Approximately 18 same-aged children have their own room, along with their "upbringers" (*vospitatel'nitsy*), generally three to a class. As is common throughout the school system, a precise program of child care is followed; it details when the children are fed, rest or sleep, go outside, and so on. Group playpens are the norm, so that elements of collectivism can be instilled early (Bronfenbrenner, 1970), and throughout the preschool years, the children are encouraged to share toys and to play in groups.

By the age of 2, "formal" education in art, music, nature study, and even physical education has begun. The children are also expected to learn to dress and wash themselves and begin the rudiments of "socially useful work"—looking after animals in the classroom, watering plants, cleaning up the class, and so forth (Vasil'eva, 1982). Teachers in many countries, of course, encourage their charges to clean up after themselves (although perhaps the process does not begin quite so early); the essential difference in the Soviet Union is that these activities (as with the collective orientation) are deliberately fostered to begin the process of moral character formation.

Three-year-olds move into kindergartens (*detskie sady*) where they stay, typically in groups of 20-25, until the age of 6 or 7. The character of the children's daily routine does not alter much in these years, although progressively more time is spent in formal activities and less in sleep. For 6-year-old kindergartners active preparation for schooling begins; it is at this age that reading and arithmetic are formally taught for

the first time. In addition, there are combination nursery-kindergartens—known as *yaslie-sady*.

### Elementary School

Since the latest reform of the school system in 1984, Soviet children have been able (at least in theory) to enter school from the age of 6. As I shall discuss in more detail below, the change of the age of entry into school from 7 to 6 has by no means been fully accomplished; many 6-year-olds are still being educated in kindergartens, while others go to school at age 7 without having attended any preschool program. (In 1981 only 54% of 7-year-olds entered school with formal preschool experience. The numbers are a good deal higher in the larger metropolitan centers and correspondingly low in the rural regions of the country [Dunstan, 1983; Tudge, Rogoff, & Paris, 1988].)

The school system is compulsory for all children aged 7-15. It is coeducational, free, and secular. (Parents must pay a small fee, which is reduced or waived for one-parent families, to have their children in the nursery or kindergarten.) All children wear uniforms; until they are 10, the girls wear brown dresses (with white pinafores for special days), while the boys wear blue shirts and shorts. From then on, girls wear blue skirts and jackets, with white blouses; boys wear blue trousers and jackets, with white shirts.

Children in the elementary grades (the first four, assuming entry at age 6, or three if entry is at age 7) attend school 6 days a week; they have the same teacher for all classes, which last 45 minutes, with a break between classes. In the course of a week there are 24 periods for the elementary school child. Approximately half of that time is devoted to the Russian language, a quarter to mathematics, and the remainder divided between art, music and singing, physical education, nature study, and elementary "labor training" (Morison, 1983). Class sizes are typically around 40, with children sitting in double desks in serried

ranks, facing the teacher. The walls generally have their complement of pictures, posters, and other educational/political displays, but the children's own work is not featured.

### Secondary School

Children in the Soviet Union go through 11 years of schooling (assuming school entry at age 6), with the possibility of an additional year for children in the republics in which Russian is not the native language. The number of compulsory classes increases to 29 per week in the fifth grade and then to 32 from the ninth grade onward. Optional classes only appear from the seventh grade and consist of between two and four classes per week (Morison, 1983).

At the secondary level the classes are also 45 minutes long, but the students go to different teachers for the different subjects. The curriculum is heavily weighted toward formal academic subjects, although there is also emphasis on the "polytechnical" side of education. Polytechnical education (also known as "education for labor") includes time spent in school workshops, but the aim is also to provide students in the upper grades with opportunities to work in a factory or collective farm. The aim of the reform is to allow students "to make a well-considered choice of occupation" (Guidelines, 1984, p. 66).

Grades 5-9 constitute what is known as the "incomplete secondary school"; since the 1984 reform, the last 2 years of school take two different forms. Children can either complete their schooling in the "complete secondary school" or they can go to a relatively new institution known as the "secondary vocational-technical school." This new institution is an amalgam of schools that, in the past, were primarily vocational in orientation, providing technical rather than academic skills, and schools that were designed to provide professional skills such as teaching. In addition, there are evening schools and correspondence schools for students who have already begun their

working lives but who want to continue, or return to, their education (Guidelines, 1984).

Homework is expected beginning with the first year a child goes to school—ranging from 1½ hours a night to 4 hours a night by the last years of school (Dunstan, 1982). The extent to which homework is taken seriously varies, however. Some children seem not to do any at all; in other families, the parents provide a good deal of help.

Homework generally consists of work that is supposed to be learned by heart for oral presentation in school the following day. Performance, which involves being called on by the teacher, standing, and answering not only correctly but in the prescribed manner, is graded on a five-point scale. A 5 is given for excellent work; 2, for poor work, is rarely given; and 1 is virtually unheard of. One difficulty of this nonstandardized system of grading is that it is open to clear abuse, demanded, in some cases, by the school system itself. If a region is not satisfied with the grades given, the schools (or more commonly the teachers) who have awarded bad grades are required to raise them. Generally teachers simply artificially raise their pass rates (Dunstan, 1982). Other types of testing, such as the use of IQ tests, are considered much less effective than more qualitative means of assessing children's abilities and have not been used since 1936 (Sutton, 1980).

On occasion, a child is held back to repeat a grade, but this is generally frowned on by all concerned. Many steps are taken before retention occurs; class pressure is placed on the child (who is told that his or her performance is making the class comrades look bad), the child may be placed with a more competent (or simply diligent) classmate who can provide help with the assignments, and the child's parents may be brought before the school's director so that he (although teachers tend to be female, directors are often male) may pressure the parents into providing more home assistance. One technique for modifying a

child's behavior that is most definitely not used is corporal punishment, which is expressly forbidden. Children are not tracked or streamed in any way; the assumption is that virtually all children can cover the required material, and those who are weaker in some area can better be helped by being placed with more competent peers than by being educated in some supposedly homogeneous group of weaker students.

### Exceptional Children

Virtually all children go through the same system. The only exceptions are children who are deemed "exceptional" in some way, either because of special abilities or because of some physical or mental handicap. Approximately 2%-3% of children deemed to have special abilities or talents (particularly in the arts or sciences) are educated in special schools (Dunstan, 1987).

Similarly, children with profound physical or mental handicaps are educated in special schools run by the Ministries of Health or Social Security (for those with most severe problems) or the Ministry of Education (Gallagher, 1974; Sutton, 1980). It is interesting that Soviet specialists working in the area of special education make a clear distinction between children who are "permanently" and "temporarily" retarded and treat the two groups very differently. The dominant view is that temporary delays, which may be occasioned by problems in the child's immediate social context, are essentially remedied by intervention that does not require education in separate schools (Sutton, 1980).

### The Training and Status of Teachers

Traditionally, the status of teachers, particularly at the preschool and elementary levels, has not been high. Few teachers at this level have a university education, most graduating from one of a variety of colleges of education that specialize in this level of teaching. Courses of study typically range from 2 years, for teachers who completed

10 years of schooling, to 4 years, for those who completed 8 years (Zimin, 1977). It is, moreover, a profession dominated by women; 70%-80% of teachers are women (Szekely, 1986), while virtually no men work with elementary children except as school directors. The predominance of women has contributed to the perception of the profession as low status.

However, efforts have been made over recent years to increase the rewards of the profession, both materially and in terms of status. Among the goals of the 1984 reform are that teachers should receive a 25%-35% pay raise (although even with a 35% pay increase, teachers' salaries will only be brought up to the national average for white-collar workers [Szekely, 1986]), and to provide all teachers with refresher courses lasting 3-6 months every 5 years, all expenses paid. Similar improvements are planned in terms of special paid vacations, improved medical treatment, and even the provision of apartments (Guidelines, 1984). Steps are also being planned to bring more men into the profession.

Teacher performance is evaluated every 5 years, by a committee consisting of the school director and teacher union and Party representatives. The report on performance makes its way up the hierarchy, from staff meetings, to committees at the district and regional levels. At each stage of the process, the teachers being evaluated can object to what is being said, defend themselves, and so on. The results of this evaluation are that typically 10%-15% of teachers are awarded an honor. The vast majority are simply graded competent, while a further 10%-15% are required to improve their competence in some way. A tiny percentage is asked to resign from the profession (Dunstan, 1982).

### The Structure of Schooling in Historical Perspective

The nature and structure of the contemporary Soviet educational system can be best understood in light of its historical and

ideological foundations. Since the formation of the Soviet Union in 1917, stress has been placed on keeping control of the educational system firmly in the hands of the state. This means that there are no private schools to which children can be sent, and the curricula in the various preschool and school institutions are enshrined in documents that are changed only after discussion at the highest levels. One implication is that, with few exceptions (which will be discussed below), children in all schools across the Soviet Union will be taught much the same material in pretty much the same way. A second implication is that changes in the curricula are not undertaken lightly; a school director has no power to implement something new. This does not mean, however, that curricular changes are few and far between. In the 70 years of the existence of the Soviet Union, changes in the structure and content of schooling are evident, with much alteration occurring in the 1920s and 1930s, once again after the death of Stalin, and, to a very limited extent, in the Brezhnev era (Tudge, 1973). The 1984 reforms, drafted while Andropov was in power (Aliyev, 1984), and the current campaign to allow teachers greater control over the curriculum (Suddaby, 1989) should be viewed as part of a continuing attempt to improve the effectiveness of the educational system. Moreover, belying the notion that an autocratic regime simply imposes change from above, these changes have been accompanied by a good deal of debate at all levels of society.

The first requirement of the new state was simply to ensure an adequate system of education for all its citizens. In 1917, only 20% of children attended any type of school, and in what is now known as Soviet Central Asia, the percentages of literacy varied from 2%-8% (Kuzin, 1977). If the situation for children was bad, the Revolution and resulting civil war led to yet greater hardship in the country. In 1921, for example, a Gomel teacher reported begging, prostitution, madness, and death from

starvation among his colleagues (Fitzpatrick, 1971). During this period, one focus of debate was simply how best to train and pay sufficient teachers to bring some level of education to all who needed it. A different, and very lively, debate also related to the form the new education should take; the first years after the Revolution witnessed a veritable explosion of ideas, including the notion that all control of education should be passed over to the children themselves (Riordan, 1987).

In the first years after the Revolution, the Ministry of Enlightenment (*Narkompros*) believed that enlightenment among schoolchildren could best be fostered by adopting a system of "complexes" (or projects) loosely modeled on the views of John Dewey (Brickman, 1964; Fitzpatrick, 1971). By 1931, however, this view of relatively informal educational practice had given way to the formal didactic system of teaching that still characterizes current schooling.

One factor that came to exert a large influence over the development of the educational system was not a decision or theory from above but the practical work of one educator, Makarenko. In the 1920s and 1930s, he worked with groups of children made homeless by the depredations of the Revolution, civil war, and the famines that followed. These children, named *bezprizorniki*, numbered approximately 7 million in 1922 (Bowen, 1962). Most of them lived in gangs, roaming the land, stealing to live, and seemingly impervious to attempts to deal with them.

Makarenko strongly disapproved of the educational practices being suggested by contemporary child psychologists (known as pedologists) or by those advocating the Dewey-related complex approach to education. He believed that education was not a passive medium within which children could develop "as nature intended" but was a means to an end—a communist end. His methods were based on the primacy of collective thought and action. Everything was done with the collective in mind; individual

activity, as such, was accorded little importance, and children were discouraged from engaging in "acollective" activities. He organized his colonies of youths in a semi-militaristic fashion, dividing them into various groups known as detachments, with the emphasis on working together as a team. Competition between the detachments was introduced to speed completion of the work that had to be done (Bowen, 1962; Caskey, 1979).

Makarenko retained a steady conviction that these children were in no sense depraved or morally defective; "they were simply ordinary children placed by fate in the most absurd situation—deprived of the blessings of human development" (Makarenko, quoted in Bowen, 1962, p. 118). He asserted his belief that, "if a child goes wrong, it is not the child who is blamed but the method of education" (Makarenko, quoted in Bowen, 1962, p. 169). The degree of success he achieved in the most unpromising of situations has been reflected in the extent to which his methods and techniques are still both cited and used in Soviet schools today.

### The Education of 6-Year-Olds

For the remainder of this article, I shall consider in more detail some aspects of elementary education in the Soviet Union. One of the most interesting aspects of the 1984 reform is that 6-year-olds are, for the first time, being brought into the formal structure of the educational system. This issue is of some theoretical as well as practical significance.

Debate about the advisability of sending 6-year-olds to school has centered around the question of the extent to which their education should be formal and academic or informal, featuring a good deal of play. This question has theoretical as well as practical implications, for one of the main tenets of educational psychology, derived from the work of Vygotsky, Leont'ev, El'konin, Davidov, and their colleagues is that the leading activity of the years until 7

is play rather than study. This theoretical stance is reflected in the general orientation of both kindergarten and the school. Traditionally, children aged 3-7 have spent much of their time playing (often outdoors, on swings or climbing frames, sometimes in organized games, make-believe or role-playing games) as well as engaging in the more formal educational practices such as listening to stories, drawing, modeling with clay, singing, and so on.

Even before the changes in the school structure, the final year of kindergarten devoted more time to more formal activities and included some early mathematics (counting and adding numbers to 10, some knowledge of time and the seasons, etc.), reading (and learning small poems by heart), and so on. Nevertheless, the atmosphere was considerably less formal and didactic than what would be found in school. The debate has thus centered on the extent to which schoolteachers (rather than those who work in kindergartens) can be encouraged (or expected) to include a sufficiently informal atmosphere for the 6-year-olds who enter school, and on the extent to which children of this age need a more play-centered education (Dunstan, 1983).

It is worth mentioning at this point that play in kindergarten should not be confused with the type of informal education seen in many British primary schools in the 1960s and 1970s. It is true that the kindergarten has always allotted a good deal of time to activities (particularly artistic) that, in England and the United States, would typically provide children with opportunities for self-expression. In Soviet kindergartens, however, control over the curriculum extends down even to children's drawings, which are praised to the extent to which they are accurate representations of reality (Shipler, 1984). The current concerns with the lack of creativity exhibited by schoolchildren (which will be discussed in more detail later) may reflect the rather formal approach seen in most preschools.

Despite the fact that play is often not what, in the West, would perhaps be termed free play, Davydov has argued that the pre-school should be devoted entirely to play, because only in the course of play (particularly role play) can creativity be developed. "It is better that a child should go to school knowing nothing but having a lot of imagination" (Davidov, personal communication, quoted in Tudge et al., 1988, p. 2).

The opposite view expressed is that the American and Western European experience has indicated that children younger than 7 can benefit from a more academically oriented education (Dunstan, 1982). Support for this view has been provided by a series of studies in experimental schools in and around Moscow, in the Baltic Republics, and in Georgia in which some 6-year-olds have been exposed to more formal academic instruction for over 20 years (Amonashvili, 1989; Monakhov & Pyshkalo, 1984; Zverev, Podd'iakov, & Pyshkalo, 1985).

At the theoretical level, the debate has been won (at least for the present) by those wishing to see 6-year-olds educated in schools. At the practical level, however, the picture is a good deal less clear-cut. In 1980, when the proposal to bring 6-year-olds into the school system was first formally announced, 56% of them were already in preparatory groups in kindergartens, and 16% were in experimental classes in schools (known as zero classes). The remaining children (most of whom are from rural areas) were in no formal educational setting (Dunstan, 1987). By 1988, almost half of the 6-year-olds were enrolled in first grade (Szekely, 1988b), although the percentage still varies widely from urban areas, where approximately 80% are currently enrolled, to rural areas, where only around 25%-30% are in formal educational settings (Tudge et al., 1988). The delay in bringing 6-year-olds into school has been occasioned, in part, by the fact that the number of school-age children has not declined, as had been projected. Moreover, the intention

to reduce the average class size from 40 to 30 pupils has slowed the pace of change.

In Moscow at least, the 20% of children who neither are in school nor in preschool are required to attend special "preparedness" lessons. Moreover, to help parents prepare their children for school, there are numerous books, a monthly journal, television programs, and even special lectures (Tudge, 1973; Tudge et al., 1988).

As currently expressed, the aim of the education of 6-year-olds, both in schools and in preparatory classes in kindergarten, is "molding of academic learning activity . . . in the course of correctly organized lessons" (Zverev et al., 1985, pp. 12-13). In line with the way the Soviet educational system is organized in general, the expectation is that precisely the same curriculum can and should be used for all children at this age. Difficulties in learning are not held to be the result of deficiencies in the child (except in special circumstances, already mentioned) but rather the result of incorrectly planned teaching.

The content of the curriculum for this age group is designed to provide them with "a certain corpus of subject knowledge, and the skills and habits needed for reading, writing, and arithmetic" (Zverev et al., 1985, p. 14). At the same time, "play activity" is also required, as well as time for nature study, field trips, and the like. For this reason, Zverev and his colleagues object to the provision of standardized teaching textbooks (as is commonly found with 7-year-olds) for children of this age. "The intention is to avoid presenting instruction—the assimilation of a defined amount of knowledge, skills, and habits—as an end in itself, as something that has no bearing upon the tasks involved in shaping social and psychological and physiological readiness for formal instruction. . . . For the child, learning should be a blessing, a delight, a joyful expression of childhood" (Zverev et al., 1985, pp. 15-16).

Perhaps it is not surprising that, given the dual requirements of a standardized



form of instruction and encouragement of children's individuality, problems have been encountered. Some teachers seem simply to have shifted the material previously reserved for 7-year-olds onto the 6-year-olds. Many schools do not have teachers who feel comfortable incorporating play (even didactic games) into their teaching methods, and many kindergarten teachers feel uncomfortable with the requirements of teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic to children in the school-preparatory classes. Many schools and kindergartens seem not to have properly equipped rooms, teaching materials, and instructional resources (Zverev et al., 1985). One of the main requirements is thus to train teachers more effectively to work with the 6-year-olds, whether in school or in the kindergarten (Monakhov & Pyshkalo, 1984).

### Moral Aspects of Education

One might assume, given the emphasis on formal didactic teaching and academic skills that is the dominant impression from a look at any Soviet school, that greatest weight is given to the academic side of the educational process. In fact, this is far from the case. The most crucial component of education (indeed, of all the various institutions of socialization) is moral development. This term has a particular meaning in the Soviet Union, relating to what has often been described as the development of the "new Soviet man" (Bauer, 1952; Tudge, 1973; Zverev et al., 1985). There are two important components in communist morality: the development of a collectivist mentality and the inculcation of an appropriate attitude toward labor. The new Soviet man (and woman) is "someone who is striving collectively with his fellows to build Communism, who is devoted to the Motherland and has the good of society at heart, who has been educated polytechnically and has a love of labour" (Tudge, 1973).

#### The Development of Collectivism in the Elementary School

As mentioned above, a collective mentality is inculcated even in the nursery,

where it is common to see infants in group cribs (Bronfenbrenner, 1970). From the time that children enter the nursery until they leave school they encounter a style in which teachers strive to have them consider the group rather than themselves as individuals.

To some extent this is true of all educational systems; children are encouraged to share their toys, to play together, to consider the requirements of others in their class and school. Prosocial behavior is valued everywhere. However, whereas these laudable goals are not an explicit part of the curriculum in American schools (but are perhaps better thought of as being part of the "hidden curriculum"), they are absolutely explicit in the Soviet system (Csapo, 1984). For example, Zaporozhets, Markova, and Radina (1968, p. 3) have described the task of the preschool as "indoctrinating preschool children with collectivism." Stress is continually placed on sharing and joint activity. The children come to evaluate action in terms of the group and are expected to take an ever-increasing part in the acceptance of communal responsibilities (Bronfenbrenner, 1970).

On the basis of "everyday moral conduct," which is taught until it becomes habitual, the child is supposed to learn the norms of morality that govern the collective—that is, to understand and make allowance for the interests and wishes of others and take part in collective efforts to reach a common goal (Kalinin, 1969). As the 1982 preschool program puts it, the goal is to "develop joint cooperation and mutual help in the course of play, kindness and a willingness to help one's comrades, and the means to regulate disagreements" (Vasil'eva, 1982). The role of the collective has been stressed since the 1920s when Krupskaya (Lenin's wife, and someone highly influential in the early development of the Soviet system of education) declared in 1927: "We believe that a child's personality can be best and most fully developed only in a collective. For the collective does not

destroy a child's personality and it improves the quality and content of education" (Krupskaya, quoted in Bowen, 1962).

Working for the collective is fostered in school partly through membership in one of a number of organizations to which children belong. All children, from 6 to 9 years of age, are in the "Octobrists," named after the October Revolution. Once they have entered school, all children are initiated into the Octobrists on the anniversary of the Revolution (November 7, after the change in the calendar). The ceremony is both serious and festive; it comes about only after all the new school entrants have been taught about Lenin, the Revolution, the importance of being in the collective, and so on. Membership is confirmed by the wearing of a five-pointed badge with a picture of 3-year-old Lenin in the middle. The rules of the Octobrists are prominently displayed; among them are the following: Octobrists are hard workers, love school, and respect their elders; only those who love work are Octobrists (Riordan, 1987).

When children are 10, they move out of the Octobrists into the Pioneers—part of whose job is to look after the Octobrists. All children become Pioneers and are able to wear the coveted three-cornered red scarf around their necks. Despite this automatic "promotion," the honor of joining is taken very seriously. Emphasis is on being a model student who is worthy of the honor. Unlike the induction of the Octobrists, a maximum of 10 Pioneers can be admitted at any one time; it is thus a source of pride to be one of the first. A Pioneer has to promise, among other things, to be "an honest and loyal comrade, always steadfastly standing up for the truth," and "a comrade and leader for the Octobrists" (Riordan, 1987). Krupskaya viewed the importance of the Pioneer organization as being that it reaches children at an age when their personalities are being formed, enabling them to "develop . . . civic habits and a social consciousness" (quoted in Harper, 1929, p. 61). At the age of 15, children may enter

the Komsomol (Communist Youth League), although this is a more selective organization, encompassing only about 60% of the eligible population of 15-28-year-olds.

Collectivism does not end at membership in these organizations, however, but is an integral part of school life, each class being organized into subunits, which are expected to work together. For example, the Octobrists in each class are divided into "little stars" (*zvezdochki*) of five or six children. Each child in the star is supposed to take a turn at being the leader (*kotmandir*), and, as the book describing the duties of these youth organizations puts it, all children are expected "to learn to behave in a lively and independent way within the group, to be responsible for the common cause, fairly to assess their own behaviour and that of classmates, and to learn to be a reliable helper to Komsomol and Party members" (quoted in Riordan, 1987, p. 140).

Similarly, for all lessons, the class is divided into "links," with each link comprising a row of desks, which is the minicollective of each child. Within this collective, individual ability and neatness are important, but primarily because of their contribution to the collective. So competition is encouraged, but between links rather than individuals. This "socialist competition," which can involve studies, work, sports, conduct, and so on, takes place between links, classes, schools, and regions. It is important, therefore, that all individuals in any group should, for the sake of the group, be prevailed on to study, work, and behave well; the status of the individual depends on the status of the group. Members of the classroom link are thus expected to help each other; if one is weak at math, a brighter person will be detailed to help him or her, and the performance of the former will reflect on the latter. The same sort of thing occurs between classes, where older children "adopt" younger ones, play with them, and help them with their homework (Tudge, 1973).

The emphasis on the collective has not been without cost, however. In particular, increasing concern has developed over the extent to which individual initiative can be fostered within a collective context. This concern, which has been a continuing source of debate, should not be seen simply as clash of two diametrically opposing factors; the point is, rather, that Soviet educators believe that true initiative can only be fostered within the collective; as Valsiner (1984) points out, this is a necessary component of the interdependence of each Soviet citizen and the country as a whole. This notion goes back to Marx: "Human emancipation will only be complete when the real, individual man has absorbed in himself the abstract citizen, when as an individual man in his everyday life ... he has become a *social being*" (quoted in Tudge, 1973, p. 12). Similarly, as Zosimovskii argued: "Total moral freedom" results when the individual consciously, genuinely, and voluntarily follows "the demands of recognized moral necessity." In brief, "in Marxist ethics the essence of moral activity lies in part in conscious and voluntary self-subordination to social duty" (1974, quoted in Tudge, 1985, p. 5).

Nevertheless, there seems to be a feeling at present that education in the collective has, at least as currently constituted, stifled initiative, independence, and creativity. Fel'dshtein, for example, has made the point that, although there is no contradiction between individualism and collectivism (for the former is fostered in the latter), there may be a danger when conformity to the demands of the collective is generated (Tudge et al., 1988). At present, there is a good deal of concern with the related problem of finding ways to foster "creative learning" within the collectively organized classroom. Currently, various research groups at the Institute of General and Pedagogical Psychology (the most prestigious school-related research institute of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences) are examining ways of fostering independence of

thought on the part of schoolchildren. For Yakimanskaya, "the general form of this approach [to make children more independent in the learning process] is to emancipate children from the teacher's influence. The humanization and democratization of children need this" (quoted in Tudge et al., 1988, p. 3).

An alternative suggestion has been to build a different relationship between teachers and pupils in which cooperation and creativity are fostered by giving more freedom to both. Among the most interesting recent developments is an intense debate about the merits of encouraging creativity not only among pupils but also allowing it for teachers themselves. A series of articles in the widely read teachers' newspaper *Uchitel'skaya Gazeta*, beginning in October 1986 and still in progress (Suddaby, 1989; Szekely, 1988a), has argued that teachers must be given more freedom to encourage children to develop their own tastes and interests in the course of both schoolwork and play. The debate has focused on where power should be centered—on the teachers themselves or, as traditionally, primarily in the hands of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences (Kuebart, 1989; Suddaby, 1989). The teacher-innovators who have written these articles or manifestos under the heading of the "Pedagogy of Co-operation" argue that the school system needs to undergo *perestroika* and that the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences has contented itself with "restoration rather than reorganization" (quoted in Suddaby, p. 255).

Whatever the result of this extended debate, it seems clear that the relationship between teacher and pupils will have to change if a sense of initiative and independence is to be developed among children. Casual observation at any typical Soviet school still reveals that what the children learn to do best is to answer the teacher's questions in the approved fashion; clearly there is a correct answer and a correct way in which to answer, and deviations from

this model are rare indeed (Muckle, 1984; Shipler, 1984).

### The Development of an Appropriate Attitude to Labor

If inculcating in children a true sense of collectivism is a major goal of Soviet educators, a second is ensuring that children are brought up with the appropriate set of attitudes about labor. There is, of necessity, a clear relationship between these attitudes and the development of Soviet morality in a collective setting: "Love of work is a moral quality that can only be fostered within the collective. The more powerful the collectives' respect for work, the more effective the character moulding of each schoolchild" (Sukhomlinsky, 1977, p. 199).

This inculcation of a love of labor is supposed to begin early, certainly during the preschool years, and it is fostered both in the kindergarten and, though not directly, at home. Books, articles in the newspapers, and television programs are all used to describe the valuable social role played by all types of labor, even the most menial. They also encourage parents to accustom their children to engage in some "socially useful work." In the home, this means little more than helping to tidy up, helping with the dishes, and so on—just as would be expected of children in many countries. The main differences are the age at which children are first encouraged to engage in these types of activities, and the fact that the goal is not primarily to assist parents (or, more accurately in the Soviet context, the mother) but to instill an attitude about the value of labor.

In the kindergarten, training in work-related attitudes is more explicit; 5- and 6-year-olds are expected to help look after the gardens (both flower and vegetable) that are ubiquitous in preschool institutions, to take care of any class pets, fish, and so on, and even to lay the table for meals and clean up afterwards (Kolmakova, 1977). Children of this age are even given rudimentary instruction about the types of occupations com-

monly found in the region, and many of the play materials are chosen expressly to foster a love of work (O'Dell, 1983). It is worth stressing that the main emphasis is on the attitude to work rather than on the work itself. In the course of engaging in these types of tasks, particularly those that require cooperation with others, children are expected to acquire the correct attitudes. As mentioned previously, one of the rules for Octobrists states: "Only those who love to work can be called Octobrists."

This type of training is continued in the elementary grades, "socially useful labor" being required of all children from second grade onward (Muckle, 1988) and, under the name "polytechnical education," throughout the school system. Of the 24 hours of class time in the week of elementary schoolchildren, 2 are devoted to "workshop training" (Morison, 1983). Since the 1984 reform, the hours have been doubled for pupils in the ninth and tenth grades. Moreover, 5 full days in the school year for fifth to seventh graders and 1 month for ninth graders are spent working in either an industrial or agricultural setting (Muckle, 1988; O'Dell, 1983). After the tenth and eleventh grades, it is expected that the pupils will have received sufficient training in one or other occupationally relevant skill to be certified in its use (Szekely, 1986).

Children are expected to engage in socially useful work not only in school. They participate in the yearly *subbotniki* during which adults and children leave their regular workplace for the streets, to help weed and tidy up areas of common land, plant flowers, rake up the debris accumulated over the long winter, put on a fresh coat of paint, and so on. The Pioneers are encouraged to engage in work-related activities in the various Pioneer Houses and Palaces to be found in every city. Just as in school, children can learn skills from typing to metal-working, from cooking to developing new breeds of maize (O'Dell, 1983; Tudge, 1973).

## Conclusion

From the first days after the Revolution, Lenin viewed education as the main means by which to foster a communist mentality in subsequent generations. He was also aware that the Soviet Union needed to provide its citizens with a system of education sufficient to transform the country into an industrially advanced society, able to compete with (if not surpass) the West. These aims have been translated into a system of education that has virtually eradicated illiteracy and has brought forth highly sophisticated technological accomplishments.

The limits of the effectiveness of the system are perhaps best seen in the fact that the highly formal, didactic teaching methods have not lent themselves well to the formation of independent or creative thinking in young people. Moreover, despite the emphasis on instilling a love of labor in its future workers, the Soviet system of education does not appear to have been particularly effective in encouraging children to aspire to most industrial or agricultural occupations. In the 1960s and 1970s, over 80% of school-leavers wanted to go to the more prestigious academic institutions of higher education rather than to vocational or poly technical institutes (O'Dell, 1983). The percentage of high aspirers has dropped in recent years, but significant numbers of would-be students are still invariably disappointed. Moreover, the problems that Gorbachev is currently having with *perestroika*, in particular that many workers are still unwilling to take on sufficient measure of responsibility for the quality of the work they are doing, are a reflection of the failure of the system to fulfill one of its main goals.

The 1984 reform is one of a continuing series of changes that have taken place in the 70 years of the Soviet state. No doubt it is not to be the last. It will be interesting, to say the least, to see the next reform—a reform that will, presumably, bear the unmistakable imprint of Gorbachev. He, just as previous leaders of the Soviet Union, is

likely to view the system of education as the primary means of effecting changes in thinking and attitudes. It remains to be seen whether his goals will be more easily realizable that has been the case in the past.

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